THE PAULINE BENEDICTION

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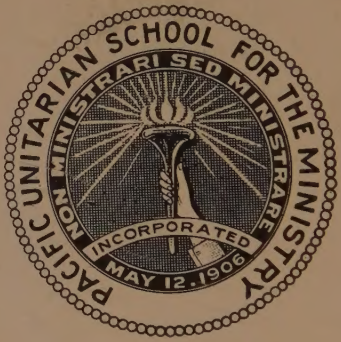

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THE PAULINE BENEDICTION

THE

Pauline Benediction

THREE SERMONS

PREACHED IN THE

Chapel of Manchester College, Oxford

BY

JAMES DRUMMOND, M.A., LL.D., Litt.D.

Principal of the College

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THE PAULINE BENEDICTION.

I.

THE GRACE OF CHRIST.

'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.—*2 Cor.* xiii. 14.

THIS is the earliest literary expression of the great religious thoughts which underlie the doctrine of the Trinity. In this undogmatic form they are the common property of Christendom, of the Unitarian no less than of the Trinitarian. The same triple combination, equally undeveloped in its details, is found in the baptismal formula, towards the end of St. Matthew's Gospel. This formula naturally furnished a basis for instruction and confession prior to the bap-

tism of converts; and from this basis gradually arose, through explanations and the addition of successive clauses, what is known as the Apostles' Creed. It is highly significant that this creed retained the ancient simplicity, and never incorporated those definitions and watchwords which became characteristic of the later orthodoxy. It has been spoken of as though it were undoubtedly trinitarian, and were thus a proof of the early existence of the doctrine of the Trinity; but in fact the dogma of three persons in one God, and of the Deity of Christ, are entirely absent from it, and the three-fold confession,—'I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,' and 'in the Holy Spirit,'—was not distinctive of any party in Christendom. It is a venerable relic of the time when the Church had not yet been torn by controversies about abstract points of theology, and it was too deeply seated in the affections

and practice of Christians to be discarded in favour of the later creeds. If it is not inconsistent with these creeds, it at all events betrays an absolute ignorance of their distinctive features.

But we must return to the words of the Apostle. These, like so many of the great utterances of the New Testament, which are the seed rather than the final expression of Christian theology, sprang, not from the philosophical thought, but from the spiritual experience and ardent feeling of the writer; and accordingly they have a special appropriateness in the only place where they occur. Paul had found in the Church at Corinth a factious temper which disturbed the peace and unity of the brethren, and, still worse, an indifference to the sensual excesses of heathenism, which darkened the conscience and dulled the religious sensibilities. His heart was stirred within him, and he concluded this great Epistle by invoking on his readers the grace, the love, the

holiness which would put an end to their vices and disputes, and bind them together in a pure and sacred fellowship. I wish, if I may, to penetrate into the heart of these words, and show their religious significance, touching as briefly as possible on their controversial aspect. To-day we must confine our attention to the first term, 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

It has been maintained that the juxtaposition of God and Christ, which is of such frequent occurrence in the Pauline Epistles, and especially the combination of these with the Holy Spirit in the present passage, proves that the Apostle recognised a plurality of persons in the God-head, and acknowledged the full and proper Deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit. To one who has not been brought up in this belief the facts convey a very different impression. When a writer speaks of God *and* Christ, he seems to distinguish them as plainly as it is possible for words to do. When the Jews

accused Stephen of 'speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God,' they did not place their Lawgiver on an equality with God, but only meant that he who spoke against the prophet and messenger of God virtually spoke against God himself. Or when the Apostles in Jerusalem wrote, 'It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us,' not to impose any greater burden on the Gentiles, they did not intend to represent themselves as equal to the Holy Spirit, but rather to intimate that they acted in subordination to higher influences, and formed their judgment in accordance with plain intimations from the Spirit. And so Paul, who believed that Jesus was a greater than Moses, the Christ whom God had sent, and raised from the dead, and highly exalted, could not hesitate to place together the names of God and of the Christ whom he had commissioned to be the founder and leader of a new spiritual manhood. The thoughts of God and Christ were indis-

solubly blended in his mind, of the one as the source, of the other as the medium, of the blessings which were being poured upon the world; but he always distinguishes God and Christ, and while he describes the latter as 'the Son of God,' he never alludes to him as 'God the Son.' These are plain and simple facts; but they are very apt to be overlooked, and it has become the practice in modern books of theology to disregard them, and assume without discussion that Paul's view is in agreement with the dogma which took its final shape only centuries after his time.

Another circumstance which separates the Pauline benediction from the formula of the theologians is the appearance of the name of Christ in the first place. Although the so-called Athanasian Creed pronounces the three persons to be co-equal and co-eternal, nevertheless they are always mentioned in one order, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: why does Paul place

the name of Christ first? Two reasons may be given.

Paul's greeting at the beginning of his Epistles generally takes the form, 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,' and this order is never reversed; but his ordinary benediction at the end of the Epistles is simply 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you,' or 'with your spirit.'[1] It is probable that he was about to close his second letter to the Corinthians in the usual way, and then, as an afterthought, added, out of the fulness of his heart, the weighty words which the occasion seemed to demand. Thus quite spontaneously came the benediction, the deepest in meaning and the richest in spiritual blessing that can be pronounced on a Christian Church.

And, again, the name of Christ may here occupy the first place because it was prior

[1] Eph., Col., and the Pastoral Epistles have a different form of benediction.

in the order of spiritual experience. The love of God and the fellowship of the Spirit were folded, as it were, in the grace of Christ, and it was through this that they were brought home to the hearts of the disciples, and made living realities within them. The first in experience is not the first in thought; but through experience we climb to higher altitudes, and by the door of the seen we enter the unseen. The gracious and tender beauty, the exalted holiness of Christ's character touched the hearts that were prepared for its influence, and told them of a love which was its source and its animating centre, and awoke within them the consciousness of a Divine Spirit cleansing their earthly and selfish life, and drawing them into a blessed fellowship with all who were like-minded. This experience created new spiritual perceptions, and called for a new interpretation of man and of his relation to God. Thus the grace of Christ which had moved visibly upon the earth, and come

into vital contact with human souls, and been wrought by the power of a devoted life and death into human history, was the motive power which carried the mind beyond the confines of the world, and set it amid the eternal scene, where it searched out the deep things of God, and read his purposes of love, embracing all times and lands within his vast redeeming plan. To Paul's own mind the grace of Christ must always have brought this wealth of meaning; but here, under the stress of strong emotion, he gives it distinct utterance, and expressly attaches to it the highest love and the grandest fellowship to which the thought of man can soar.

Let us dwell more at length upon some of these ideas.

The word grace, though it is not confined to the writings of Paul, is very markedly a Pauline term; and this fact is probably due to the peculiar experience of the Apostle. A profound spiritual change had suddenly

taken place within him, a change which was directly counter to the whole conscious tendency of his previous life, and which he himself could only ascribe to the free and unmerited love of God. This love had come to him in a vision of Christ, which spoke to his heart with an irresistible appeal; and thenceforward it seemed that his life was no more his own, but flowed from a Divine power, even from the spiritual indwelling of the glorified and immortal Son of God. To this freedom of pardon, this Divine call, this inward strengthening and equipment for the fulfilment of a Divine purpose, he gave the name of grace, adopting an ancient and common term, but filling it with a distinctively Christian meaning. It was the grace of God that made him what he was, and wrought mightily within him in the accomplishment of his Apostolic labours. But it was in Christ that this grace took form, and became apprehensible as a new type of Divine life. He was the full re-

ceptacle into which the Divine Spirit was poured without stint, and from which were dispensed in partial measures the various gifts of grace which fitted men for their several activities in the Church. Hence Paul speaks so often of the grace of Christ, describing thereby at once the graciousness of his character and his gracious influence upon the hearts of his disciples. It is not very often that Paul has occasion to refer to the character of Christ; but whenever he does allude to it, it is to this aspect of it. We hear of the 'love of Christ,' of the 'meekness and gentleness of Christ,' of the 'tender mercies of Christ Jesus,' of the 'peace of Christ,' and, in a combination that reminds us of our text, of 'comfort in Christ, consolation of love, fellowship of the Spirit.' We are told how he graciously forgave, how willingly he received men, and how, renouncing every claim for himself, he endured affliction and death for the sake of the sinful. How much is implied in these

simple phrases; and if the grace of Christ in this sense took possession of all hearts, how sweet and lovely would life become, and the desert of human selfishness and sin would begin to blossom as the rose, and emit the fragrance of heavenly words and deeds.

And now we must try to apply these things to our own hearts and lives, and view them in the light of our own thought. Our experience is not the same as Paul's and we necessarily look at spiritual truth with other eyes. He himself knew well that knowledge passes away, and his knowledge has been lost in the accumulated store which centuries of science have laid at our feet. But though the proportion of things is altered, and our little world no longer furnishes the great drama that absorbs the counsels of heaven, the substance of Christian truth remains, and we cannot but wonder at the insight which pierced so deeply into abiding verities, and left so little room for

the local and temporary. Paul saw that the Christian revelation was one, primarily, not of dogma, but of a spirit of life, and this revelation remains through all changes in our forms of thought. It is often said that you can have no religion without dogma, and that therefore dogma must constitute the substance of revelation. It is true that all religion implies some belief which is capable of dogmatic statement; but dogma is a precisely cut form of doctrine, which is accepted as the authoritative statement of a church's belief, and religion can certainly exist without this. You may have a very dim perception of the outlines of truth, and yet go straight to its heart, and feel its quickening energy; and on the other hand you may be familiar with all established dogmas, and think you believe them, and yet your religion may be cold and superficial. The deepest truths do not come by way of the understanding, and no dogma can make them known. The grace of Christ, and the

love of God, and the communion of the Spirit, are not doctrines, which can be taught to those who have no spiritual eye to discern them, but realities which must be seen and felt before they can be understood. And this is the peculiarity of the Christian revelation, that it comes to us as the word made flesh. It is the disclosure of a pure and consecrated soul, bringing the love of God into the midst of the world's sin and woe, and subduing men by the power of its grace. The grace and love abide, though knowledge may pass away and the forms of thought may change; and if, as many are now obliged to admit, the Teacher himself accepted on some points the opinions of the day which we can no longer accept, that does not affect the substance of the revelation, or diminish the strength of the appeal which the cross makes to our hearts. We are still in contact with a soul which was full of God, and placed itself meekly under the lead of the Divine Will.

This spiritual revelation assumes two main directions, at which we must briefly glance.

The grace of Christ discloses to us the true life of the sons of God, not necessarily indeed in its outward pattern, but in its inward spirit. We are appointed by Providence to very various duties, and each man has his own special work according to the promptings of his nature or the constraint of circumstances. But in all there may be the same gracious temper, the same spiritual beauty, springing from self-surrender to the will of God. The mind raised above the world through the power of devotion and prayer, God dwelling in us, and we in God, that is the ideal life to which we are called, and which is placed before us in Christ. I know that objections may be urged against this view, and it is sometimes said that Jesus did not in fact come up to that ideal which his followers have ascribed to him. To such abstract objections it is impossible

to return any answer founded upon history, because so little of the history is known. Behind the recorded year of speech and action lie thirty years of silence, and any opinion which we entertain in regard to them can rest only on imagination, helped by the analogies of spiritual life. For history and for reason this is disappointing; but for religion we have enough. Jesus impressed the world with a new idea of Divine sonship, and left in the hearts of his disciples a sense of grace and truth, of spiritual soundness and beauty, which they knew not elsewhere; and if this ideal became clearer and more potent after he had passed from their earthly sight, what then? The ideal reveals itself through forms of imperfection and limitation; but it is the abiding reality, the hidden man of the heart, which remains immortal when the clogs and chains of earth have dropped away.

But there is another aspect of this revelation, without which it might appal rather

than strengthen us. Had we to climb these heights by our own unaided strength in order to obtain acceptance with God, we might well despair. But the grace of Christ is the inflowing of the grace of God, and so reveals and brings near to us the tender mercy which forgives and seeks and saves, and through the appeal of love is reconciling the world to itself. Here again we may be met with an objection, and asked scornfully, how can these things be? How, in these days of historical criticism, can a finite man be the moral image of the infinite God? I pretend not to read or to understand the Infinite; but out of the darkness of the Infinite a beam of love may shine, and illumine a human face with heavenly radiance, and amid the gifts that are showered on mankind the divinest thing I know is the grace of Christ. Explain it as we may, it has brought the Divine love near to many an aching heart, and laid the healing hand of Divine power on many a sinful soul.

And so the thought of his grace carried the mind of the Apostle aloft to the love of God, who had caused his light to shine out of darkness, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Into that high region we may hope, on some future occasion, to follow him; and meanwhile may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

II.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.'—*2 Cor.* xiii. 14.

IN my last discourse I offered some reflections upon the first clause of this Pauline benediction; to-day we have to meditate on the second, the love of God. These words bring before us the central light of the Christian revelation, which is not an explaining of metaphysical mysteries to the understanding, but a disclosure of Divine love to the heart. Of this at least the New Testament is as full as the Creeds are empty; and nothing, I imagine, could have more astonished and grieved the

Apostle than to know that his glowing and impassioned words would be frozen into a proof-text of a subtle philosophical dogma. But it is so much easier to say 'I believe,' and to wave a party banner, than to surrender one's heart to the reality of God, and cherish the Divine love as the secret power of one's life. Thus often the intellect triumphed while brothers were estranged, and the form of the Apostle's blessing was invoked while its healing spirit was despised. But let us now try to enter into that spirit, and place ourselves for a time under the touch of heavenly love.

The love of God in Christ is felt chiefly in connection with our sense of sin, of estrangement from the life of God. It is to man as sinful, yet capable of holiness, that Christianity addresses its appeal. Its object was to purify a corrupt society, not by revolutionary changes in social order, but by working among the springs of individual life. It endeavoured to go deep into the

recesses of the soul, and plant there the righteousness of God, and so, in gradually widening circles, to establish the Kingdom of God among men. And this is still its endeavour. Where there is no sense of need, but simply indifference to the higher objects of human aspiration, its seed drops upon hard ground, and bears no fruit. But where there is a feeling of short-coming and weakness, and a longing for perfect communion with God, it brings its messages of peace, and braces the resolution with a new and conquering force.

There are two contrasted ways of treating sin, corresponding to two widely divergent views which may be taken of its nature.

If we direct our attention in the first instance to the manifestations of character in others, we shall be immediately impressed by the quality of their actions, which alone are open to our inspection. We shall see that some actions are injurious to the social well-being, and the power of society will be

invoked to repress such actions. Others will repel us by an instinctive sense of pain and disgust at beholding them, and these we shall endeavour to banish at least from public display. Such actions will then be classified as wrong, and be prohibited by law; and to the infraction of this law suitable penalties will be attached. The only aim is to control the outward conduct, and bring it into harmony with the requirements of civilised life; and the only appeal by which this end is secured is made to the fears of an injured self-interest, through which it is hoped that the will may be driven into a better course. Sin, when thus regarded, is a violation of the law, and nothing further, and if a man keeps his conduct within the prescribed limits, no one is entitled to find fault with him.

In this view severity is necessarily the agent of correction. If a man does wrong, he must be punished, and the punishment must be sufficiently painful to make him

shrink from repeating the offence. There may also be rewards for right conduct; and, though these are seldom offered by human laws, a system of rewards and punishments generally enters into the conception of Divine sovereignty. Rewards and punishments, however, do not differ in principle. Both are appeals to self-interest; and as the anticipation of pain is more vivid than the hope of pleasure, punishment generally secures the foremost place, and the severity of God, which inflicts the tortures of hell, is apt to fill the whole mental outlook with its lurid terrors.

Through this process it is possible that conduct may be regulated, and men driven by force to act in certain ways; and it may be that a rough and brutal treatment has its place in an undeveloped state of human life, when manners have to be formed, and the corporate activity of life established. But if sin be something more than injurious conduct, if goodness be the harmonious beauty

and consecration of the soul and its inmost springs of life, and sin be the departure from this inward ideal, and consist largely of that very selfishness to which rewards and punishments address their appeal, it is evident that the disease cannot be thus healed, and, however successfully you may govern conduct by a precise rule, you do not thereby plant the righteousness of God within the heart. Let us take a simple example. The law requires men to be honest in all their dealings, and lays down various rules forbidding modes of conduct by which this principle would be violated. But a man is not necessarily honest because he cunningly keeps himself outside the meshes of the law. He is honest only when the soul of honour dwells within, acting according to its own intrinsic law, and so rendering him independent of those lower and extraneous laws which he is now never tempted to violate. Punishment may restrain a man from being a thief, and so

long as there are thieves it is necessary so to restrain them; but I see no tendency in it to implant the soul of honour, and clear away the injustice and covetousness which are the roots of theft. So, again, punishment cannot instil that reverence for truth which makes it impossible for a man to be a liar; indeed injudicious punishment rather breaks the generous courage which carries truth upon its open brow, and begets the servile spirit which seeks a temporary refuge in trickery and falsehood. Thus law, with its rod of justice, may enforce an outward regulation, but has no balm for the diseases of the soul.

These remarks have already suggested the other way of regarding sin. We may look, not at the conduct of our neighbours, but at the temper of our own inmost being. We then see that evil actions are the outcome of evil principles, and point to a disease within the heart, an alienation from the Spirit of God, an enmity against his

righteous will. Hence arises the sense of sin, which is not proportioned to our failure in relation to an outward standard of propriety, but to our felt distance from the requirements of an inward and ideal holiness. Our problem is thereby entirely changed. We no longer ask how men are to be coerced into obedience, but how their higher aspirations are to be made quick and powerful, and the righteousness of God enthroned within their hearts. Vindictiveness and wrath stand powerless before this question. It is only love that can penetrate behind the prison doors, where the spirit sits oppressed with the manacles of sin, nursing its hostility to God, because, having departed from him, it believes that he can regard it only with detestation. Then if it can be brought to see and feel that the Divine love is close to it, asking it to repent and be reconciled, and receive healing and eternal life in communion with God, the hard heart is melted, the love of God enters

in, and works with redeeming efficacy as a new principle of righteousness.

Many stories might be told to illustrate the saving power of love. I will relate one which I read lately, and which is perhaps all the more touching as the circumstances were quite unconnected with avowedly religious work. It is related by Lord Clarence Paget, who commanded a ship in the Baltic during the Crimean war. There was an outbreak of cholera, and, he says, 'it was a distressing sight to count procession after procession of boats from the ship, carrying our comrades to their last home at the bottom of the Gulf of Finland. There was a marine of the name of Dudley in this ship, a man of incorrigibly bad character. He had been brought before me many times, and I had at last resolved to flog him; but during his examination I found that he had a sort of fixed idea in his head that "every man's hand was against him," and that he was doomed to the "fore-

yard." I remembered once before to have reclaimed a hardened character by kindness, and I thought I would try this man; and, accordingly, I freely forgave him, and desired the officers and non-commissioned officers to treat him as if he had never been an offender before. I heard no more of him . . . . until one day the surgeon came to me and said that Dudley during this frightful epidemic was his right-hand man; that he attended night and day to the poor dying patients, and that he feared the man might succumb himself from over-exertion. I was so touched at this noble reform from past errors, that I resolved to have him up next day on deck and thank him publicly. Alas! when the doctor brought me the sick report next morning, his name figured on the list of those who had died during the night.' A flogging would probably have hardened Dudley into an irreclaimable brute: mercy and trust turned him into a Christian martyr, who laid down his life in the loving service of his brethren.

The Apostle Paul, before he knew the love of God, was a man of high conscientiousness and religious zeal: yet conscience brought him only a sense of remoteness from Him whose word it was, and of the futility of his endeavours to satisfy the requirements of the Divine law. But the vision of love which broke upon his inward view changed his life. God loved him, had always loved him,—that was the supreme fact which made all things new. He had only to open his soul in faith, and allow the Divine Spirit to enter, and work the will of the Father within him. The love of God was shed abroad in his heart: he was more than conqueror through him that loved him. With the thought of self the stings of conscience fell away; he was reconciled, forgiven, brought home to the household of God; and he found himself in a world of love, which embraced all mankind, and entreated every soul to come to the Father's love, and receive the full privileges of sonship.

This revelation, however, came to Paul, not directly, but through the medium of the grace of Christ. It was there that he recognised the saving power of love, and saw how the greatest could come to the lowliest of earth's children, and through sympathy identify himself with their meanness and their sin that he might lift them to the heights of his own holiness. He saw how the soul of love could feel the shame of another's guilt, and by bearing it could waken the penitence of the guilty. He saw that the death on the cross was more than the death of a martyr bearing a faithful witness to the truth which he taught, and that the underlying motive which directed the whole tragedy was a divine compassion for the world's sin and sorrow. For a good man perhaps some would even dare to die; but to sacrifice one's life for the vicious, the criminal, the polluted, and to see in earth's vilest the enslaved children of God,—this was something new, a stumbling-block to

those who sought for greatness in separation from all external defilement and some startling sign of pomp and majesty, foolishness to those who despised the common herd, and amused themselves with the discussions of a flippant philosophy, but the power and wisdom of God to those who had faith to see and hearts to feel. For whence came this love, so free from all selfish claims of human will, bearing the seal of Divinity on its brow? If the baptism of John, the symbol of repentance and righteousness, was from heaven, and not from men, how much more the love of Christ! For his life was a life in God, surrendered in perpetual sacrifice, and receiving through prayer and consecration the richest inflowing of the Spirit of God. Thus in Christ, God was reconciling the world unto Himself; in this momentary visitation an eternal purpose was manifested; and the love which blessed the humble homes of Galilee has parted the separating veil, and opened to our eyes

glimpses (if I may so speak) into the very bosom of God.

But while we feel the reconciling power of love, we must be careful never to forget its high purpose, lest we should be tempted to trifle with sin. God desires our spiritual perfection, and love will not shrink from severity if severity be needed to secure its end. Some of the requirements of Christ are severe, far more severe than his followers generally care to contemplate; and his gentle spirit could be stirred to anger by the pretences of a false holiness. If the wrath of the Lamb, in its unselfish grief, is more terrible than the selfish rage of tyrants, the displeasure of the God of love, wounded by our rebellion and thanklessness, must be also terrible, terrible because we know that it is just. Only let us remember that he never ceases to love us, and let us meekly welcome the pains which are needed for our discipline; for these, too, are angels of his mercy, coming to prepare

us for a higher fellowship; and if we turn our eyes from the instruments of pain in their hands, and look upon their faces, we shall see that they are full of pity.

And must we not go further, and say that even the awful retribution which follows in the steps of persistent wickedness comes from the goodness as well as the justice of God? A man may harden himself against the appeals of love, and then the method of coercion must be resorted to that some limit may be set to the extravagance of his guilt, and that at least the dread of punishment may give him pause, and open his eyes to see the abyss of ruin on the edge of which he stands. He knows not that sin is spiritual death; but shattered hopes, remorse pointing sternly backwards, even the pangs of selfish fear may convince him that he has lost his way, and his heart broken with self-caused misery may submit at last, and yield itself to the healing touch of God. The love is always there, seeking

through goodness and severity to win the wanderer back, and rejoicing when that which was lost is found.

If we paused here we should have reached the central message of Christianity, but we should not yet have exhausted the meaning of the Apostle's benediction. For the love of God, in the sense on which we have hitherto dwelt, is always with us, whether we pray for it or not, whether we are conscious of it or not. But that love may pass into our own hearts, and dwell there as an active principle of life. It is only when thus acting in and through us that it can become a principle of unity, and heal our jealous divisions and enmities. And as that love dwelt in Christ, and through him brought the touch of Divine sympathy and compassion visibly upon the world, so must it dwell in the disciple; and thus love becomes the mark of a true Christendom. Love is of God, and he who has love dwells in God, and God in him. In

proportion as love takes possession of us we see the deep things of God; but he that says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness even until now. Revelation is made only by the entrance of the Divine Spirit within the field of our consciousness; and if through self-will and presumption we bar the door of our hearts against this Spirit, we shall vainly seek to approach God by the path of speculation or of dogma. No man has ever seen God, for how can the finite mind traverse the infinite, or comprehend what only eternal ages can disclose? And yet that mysterious Presence may abide with us, and he can make himself known by the Spirit which he gives us. It is in this sense that the Apostle prays that the love of God may be with the disciples at Corinth, declaring itself in tranquillity of mind, in the sacrifice of self-will, in heavenly affections, in detachment of the heart from worldly things, in mutual service and forbearance, in the redeeming power of a holy

compassion. We know not the love of God in all the fulness of its meaning,—such fulness, that is, as may come to our frail humanity,—till it is planted as a divine life within the soul, trembling back to its source in love towards God, and flowing forth as a benign and healing influence upon the world. Thus it dwelt in Christ; thus it has come down through a line of blessed saints, who counted not their lives dear unto themselves if only they might be true to its behests; thus may it abide with us forever, —yea, it will abide according to our faith and the sincerity of our prayer.

III.

THE COMMUNION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.'—*2 Cor.* xiii. 14.

IN coming to the third clause of the benediction, we pass distinctly from the individual to the church. We may have the grace of Christ and the love of God in relation to the solitary soul without considering their wider results. But the Holy Spirit, diffused as a breath of Divine life, creates a sacred fellowship, and finds full expression only in a society of holy men. This is a great subject, and one not easily treated; but I may at least invite your attention to a few serious, if very inadequate, thoughts upon it.

The term 'Holy Spirit' was familiar to the Jews, from whom it passed into Christianity. Their doctrine was not very clearly defined. Sometimes the Spirit is spoken of, in Rabbinical writings, as though it were a person created by God, and employed by him in certain parts of the Divine administration; but more generally it is regarded as the power from God which inspired the prophets and other leaders of Israel. The Jewish philosopher Philo describes it as 'the pure knowledge of which every wise man participates'; and, as knowledge is not lessened by communication, it must be regarded as an indivisible and inexhaustible essence, which, like fire, may kindle innumerable torches, and yet remain undiminished. With him it is another term for the Logos or Reason of God, limited, however, in its application, to the world of man, whereas the Logos extended through the material creation as well. The reason for this distinction may be that, while the

material world reveals itself as a system of ordered thought, it is only in the soul of man that the Spirit and holiness of God can be manifested. It was believed by the Rabbis that, among other signs of decline, it was absent from the second temple, and that, in its character of the spirit of prophecy, it ceased after the time of Malachi.

Christianity revived the ancient inspiration, and promised the Holy Spirit, not only to chosen messengers of God, not only to the wise and learned, but to the humblest soul that asked for it in faith. To the Christian community not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, had been called; yet to this community of men, weak and despised and base in the eyes of the world, Paul makes the confident appeal, 'know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?' And he carries this grand appeal on to the individual believer, 'know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is

in you, which ye have from God?' If the Spirit had departed from the second temple, and all the lavish splendour of Herod could not restore it, it had reappeared in the little groups of lowly disciples, who in various cities of the Roman Empire had begun the long struggle for God and righteousness.

The belief in the Holy Spirit, then, was founded on the felt reality of spiritual experience. There was in the believer that which took him beyond himself, a power which spoke to him as with the voice of God, and penetrated and changed his old corrupt life. This experience seems often to have come with startling suddenness. As the preacher, in the thrilling tones of one who himself was full of faith and Holy Spirit, pleaded with men for the love of Christ, the Spirit 'fell upon them,' they were carried away upon a flood of new emotion, and God and their filial relation to Him became the one absorbing reality. An experience of this kind which unexpectedly

strikes across the ordinary current of our thoughts and motives, is necessarily far more vivid than the gentler play of continuous feeling, and we are apt to become blind to the gifts of God when they are always with us; but the soft light which shines tranquilly in the heart from childhood is no less divine than the flashing ray which breaks in upon our darkness, and surprises us with unsuspected revelations. A new experience, however, is more creative, rises to greater heights of faith, and seeks to describe in fitting language the vision which it beholds; and hence it is that the belief in the Holy Spirit was, at an early period, incorporated in the Christian creed, and words begotten of burning faith are regularly uttered down to the present day, though men who make this profession too often forget, or secretly doubt, that they are temples of God. But this great doctrine of the Apostle Paul was not sufficient for the majority in the church. The subtle

intellect of the Greeks was bent on metaphysical definitions, and after prolonged controversy the doctrine of the Spirit was formulated towards the close of the fourth century; and once more the assent of the intellect to a form of words took precedence of practical faith and piety. We must seek to recover, if not the ecstatic fervours and strange tongues of the early Christians, yet their clear insight and devout communion, and to recognise the Spirit of God in the tranquil goodness and the tender affections which make the human heart beautiful.

In the New Testament no precise doctrine of the Spirit is laid down; for it deals, not with high philosophical problems, but with felt spiritual relations between God and man. The Greek word is adequately represented by our word 'Spirit,' which, like the Greek, originally meant air in motion, and particularly breath, and was then used metaphorically in other senses. It is perhaps hardly necessary to remark

that the rendering 'Ghost,' which our translators adopt when the reference is to the Holy Spirit, stands for the same Greek word; and I think this translation is misleading, because the English reader naturally supposes that there must be a different term in the original also, and because it gives to the phrase the appearance of a personal name which is not suggested by the Greek.

Let us enquire, then, what meaning the word conveys in its metaphorical use. We find it employed in the writings of the New Testament both in a personal and in an impersonal sense. As the breath was supposed to be the vital principle, which finally passed away from the body at death, it was natural to describe the disembodied personality as a breath, a spirit or ghost. Thus we hear frequently in the Gospels of evil spirits, which are also called demons, and are evidently regarded as personal. We are told in the First Epistle of Peter that Jesus, after his death 'went and preached

unto the spirits in prison, which aforetime were disobedient.'[1] Luke relates that when, after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the eleven, 'they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they beheld a spirit.'[2] Other uses are not very easily classified; but we may note a gradual transition from the personal to the impersonal. When applied to living men it is distinguished from both the body and the reason, and denotes that element of high and pure emotion whereby we come into contact with the Divine and eternal, and which ought to shed down its pervasive power through the lower parts of our being. Hence it serves to mark off that which is inward and universal in its character from that which is local and temporary: men must worship in spirit and truth, in that invisible sphere where with perfect sincerity spirit communes with spirit. Again, as breath issues from a living man, spirit signifies the

[1] iii. 19 sq. [2] xxiv. 37.

spiritual personality, regarded as a breathing and kindling power. Adam is described as only a living soul; Jesus as a life-giving spirit. So, elsewhere, Paul says that 'the Lord is the Spirit,' the living breath which fills the hearts of believers with the same life. Closely akin to this is the use of the word to express the essential character and power of a man's personality, an effluence from the conscious life within. John the Baptist was to come in the spirit and power of Elijah, reproducing in another person the same highly wrought temperament, the same zeal for righteousness, the same prophetic gift. By a further extension it means the tone and quality of the mind, as when Paul speaks of the spirit of meekness, the spirit of faith, the spirit of bondage. And lastly, it is employed in reference to things which, though proceeding from a person, are themselves impersonal, as a writing or a ceremony, and then it denotes the inner meaning, the unseen life, as distinguished from the

dead form. Thus Paul contrasts the letter and the spirit, and nearly approaches the use of the word in Alexandria to signify the allegorical truth which lay concealed beneath the literal words of Scripture.

These various uses may help us to understand what is meant by the Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit. As I have said, no metaphysical doctrine is laid down in the New Testament, and it is assumed that the current language will be sufficiently intelligible without any philosophical explanation. The language of religion is different from that of theology, being the impassioned and often poetic utterance of deep experience, whereas theology is the cold interpretation of this in forms of the understanding. Nevertheless, amid a certain vagueness of expression which naturally accompanies religious emotion, some luminous ideas shine forth, which, if they do not disclose the mode of the Divine existence, and satisfy the prying intellect of man, at least

shed a revealing light on the relations between our souls and God.

First, then, the Spirit of God must refer to the character of God, and describe in a single word the holiness, righteousness, and love which belong to him. Thus it may be contrasted with the spirit of the world, which bears the marks of selfishness, injustice, and impurity. This high quality always attaches to the term; and if we would understand the New Testament aright, we must never lower it into a mere proper name, stripped of its moral significance.

But, secondly, it is not used of the character of God in the abstract, of the solitary recesses of the Divine personality. Spirit, or breath, is that which issues forth; and the Holy Spirit is spoken of only in relation to man. It is that effluence of the Divine character which may find its seat in the soul, and change man into the image of God. Thus it was given without measure

to Jesus Christ, so that, 'according to the spirit of holiness,' he was the Son of God. And as it was through the person of Christ that the full revelation of this Spirit was made to the ancient world, Paul treats as identical the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, and even Christ himself; for, as we have already seen, he declared that 'the Lord is the Spirit,' and the Christ, stripped, through death, of the limits of mortality, became for him the universal Spirit, through whose indwelling all men were brought to God. For this Divine relationship was not confined to Christ. If in one sense he was the exceptional, in another and far higher sense he was the typical man, and we are to interpret our own nature and its possibilities through all that was most exalted in him. A man, according to the Apostle, 'is the image and glory of God,' and 'as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are Sons of God.' In separating Christ from our race, and placing him on a pinnacle of

divine solitude, instead of accepting him as 'the first-born among many brethren,' we are offering him a spurious honour in place of obedience, and spurning the gift which he died to bestow upon the world.

The idea would not be complete unless we alluded to the personality of the Holy Spirit. On this subject the New Testament has no decisive utterance, and I see no sufficient reason for supposing that any of the writers looked upon the Spirit as a person distinct from God. A few passages may indeed be appealed to in which personal attributes are ascribed to it; but if the Spirit represent the action of God's personality and will within us, this is no more than we should expect; and some of these passages are written in highly-wrought language, into which the figure of personification is easily introduced. Paul personifies righteousness, and sin, and death; yet no one imagines that these are persons. The combination of the Holy Spirit with God

and Christ in our text may suggest personality; but notwithstanding the structure of the sentence, I think that the 'Spirit' is parallel with 'grace' and 'love' rather than with 'God' and 'Christ.' The sentence in Philippians, 'If there is any comfort in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions,' where the personal and impersonal are placed in immediate connection, shows how unsafe it is to argue from these literary combinations. On the other hand, such expressions as 'filled with Holy Spirit,' or 'with Holy Spirit and wisdom,' or 'with faith (or 'with joy') and Holy Spirit,' 'anointed with Holy Spirit and power,' 'pouring out of the Spirit,' 'giving not the Spirit by measure,' the coming of the Gospel 'in power and in Holy Spirit and in much assurance,' suggest a diffused impersonal influence. It is not surprising, therefore, that there was much disputation in the Church before the dogma of the

separate personality of the Holy Spirit was finally established, and that East and West parted from one another in their attempts to define the relations of this third person of the Trinity to the other two. But it is one of the saddest things in the history of Christendom that the communion of the Holy Spirit was violated for the sake of daring speculations which lie far beyond the reach of human understanding, and that religious faith was sacrificed to intellectual definitions. When the Holy Spirit is really a power in their hearts, men are drawn to one another in brotherly love, and cannot be divided because their imperfect thoughts see with varying clearness and range into the mysteries of eternal being. All our bigotry is simply a proof of our spiritual emptiness.

I think, however, that a profound truth is involved in the doctrine of the personality of the Holy Spirit. It is that the highest and divinest influences in us are not a mere

imitation of the Spirit of God, temporary phantasms of the eternal reality. Rather are they God himself in his communion with the human soul—that, within the fulness of the Divine nature, which can enter into human consciousness, and dwell amid the limitations of our mortal life. Thus we may say, not only that the Spirit of God dwells in us, but that God himself abides in us. The two expressions denote the same truth; for God dwells in us through his Spirit, revealing his fatherly love as a life-giving power within the heart, while beyond lies, vast and unexplored, the ocean of Deity. Hence the thoughts that thrill us with their sublimity, the emotions that seem to lift us out of ourselves into an atmosphere of heavenly unselfishness, the convictions that transport us above the world, and bring us into the presence of the unseen, the warnings that speak with such solemn authority in our conscience, are the pleading of God himself, an inflowing of his

eternal life in such measure as we are fitted to receive it.

Here, then, we find the common element and distinctive mark of a true Christendom. All who surrender themselves to the leading of the Spirit are sons of God, and realise that exalted idea just in proportion to the faithfulness of their submission. Men do not become Christian by condemning the guiltless, and boasting of their own orthodoxy, but by bearing the impress of heavenly character; and we only insult our Lord when we are clamorous for his honour, and do not the things which he says. It has been our privilege to see the glory of God, his grace and love, in the face of Jesus Christ, and to behold in that Divine manhood the secret meaning of our spiritual craving and aspiration; but the clearness of our vision may aggravate our condemnation, and if any, not knowing Christ, have yielded themselves with greater humility to the Spirit of God, they will enter the kingdom of heaven before us.

It was for this reason that Paul invoked upon his beloved disciples at Corinth the communion, the common participation of the Holy Spirit. Their factious divisions, their waving of party banners, their mutual recriminations and exclusiveness, proved only the hollowness of their Christian profession. When the same Spirit of Divine love reigns in all hearts there is true fellowship, and the superficial movements of intellect and will can no more break its harmony than the rustling leaves of a forest can disturb its solemn beauty. The intellect, with its imperfect and limited powers, shapes for itself such Divine images as it can; but though the same eternal Reason may shine in every soul, we cannot all see it alike, and we interpret it according to the measure of our gift. Our activities are of many sorts, suited to the complex wants of society, and directed by the variety of our natural endowments. But through all there may be the same heavenly Spirit, the same sweet

graciousness of temper towards our fellow-men, the same loving devoutness and submission towards God. Here alone can we find the true ground of ecclesiastical unity. We seek it in vain by the pathway of the intellect; for it is the business of the intellect to question, to discuss, to explore, and knowledge is continually passing away while nature delivers up her secrets and we climb to new levels of thought. But the deep life of our common humanity, cleansed and renewed by the Spirit of God, would bind us together into a holy brotherhood, had we not built again the artificial separations which Christ destroyed; for those who adore and love the same Father in heaven must reverence and love one another. Is the time coming when men will once more have sufficient faith to demolish the dividing walls, or is the Pauline benediction to be spoken to listless ears, and Grace, Love, and Holiness to flee far from the habitations of men? We cannot read the secrets of

futurity; but our duty is plain, to keep these things and ponder them in our hearts, to walk in the Spirit even as our hidden life is in the Spirit, and, so far as we are able, to call men to a higher faith and a nobler service. And now with each and all of us may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit abide for ever.

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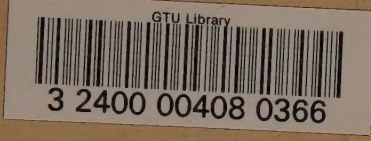

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